A Marshall Cavendish Publication 38 In Fortnightly Parts

The Ancestral Trail

Cyber Challenge in the Next Dimension

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38 Mescon, Menacing Multi-Form

Caged by the galactic zoo keeper

Julek Heller

UK £1.75 IR £1.75
Australia $4.50 NZ $5.50 Singapore $4.90 Malaysia RM5.90 Malta £M1.50 South Africa R7.95

Computer graphics produced by Mehau Kulyk

None of Richard's attempts at escape made any impression on the strange net that he and Robo had become ensnared in. Richard's limbs felt like they were made from lead as he struggled in vain to escape the grip of the powerful fluorescent bonds.

Robo spoke: "Net fibre composition unknown," he said. "Substance possesses strong magnetic properties."

"Are you saying that my armour is holding me to the net?" Richard asked.

"Affirmative."

"Isn't there any way that we can break away from the magnetic pull?"

Robo's internal processors once again clicked into action. After a few moments, he offered a reply. "Suggest that we dismount from cyber cruiser. Will produce temporary electromagnetic current to facilitate liberation."

"Do you mean you've worked out how to get us out of here?" Richard frowned.

"That is correct," Robo said.

Richard did as he was instructed and climbed down slowly from the flying machine. A sudden buzzing came from Robo and without warning the pair dropped safely to the ground below.

"What happened?" Richard asked.

"Direction of magnetic pull was reversed," Robo replied. "Instead of attracting metal, force became repellent."

Important loss

As the robot spoke, a look of concern spread over Richard's face. He stared up towards the cyber cruiser, which was still entangled in the magnetic net.

"What do we do about the cruiser?" Richard asked.

"Cyber cruiser must be discarded. Impossible to retrieve."

"I suppose it means that we'll have to walk," Richard sighed, getting to his feet and looking around. "Let's see where we are, shall we?"

They were standing inside an immense stone building. A murky cloak of darkness served to partially obscure the tapestry of barred windows that lined its crusty walls.

"Have you any idea where we are?" Richard asked.

As the words left his lips, a high-pitched hooting noise came from nearby and caught Richard's attention. It was a sound quite unlike anything he had ever before encountered. He felt himself shiver.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered.

Robo swivelled round and scanned the area around them.

"There it goes again," Richard said.

THE MENAGERIE

With Robo following closely behind him, Richard took a few careful steps into the gloom. As he walked, he became aware of other sounds that echoed ominously throughout the building.

"Have entered Inter-Galactic Zoo," Robo suddenly said.

"We're in a zoo?" Richard responded. "It's the weirdest zoo I've ever seen."

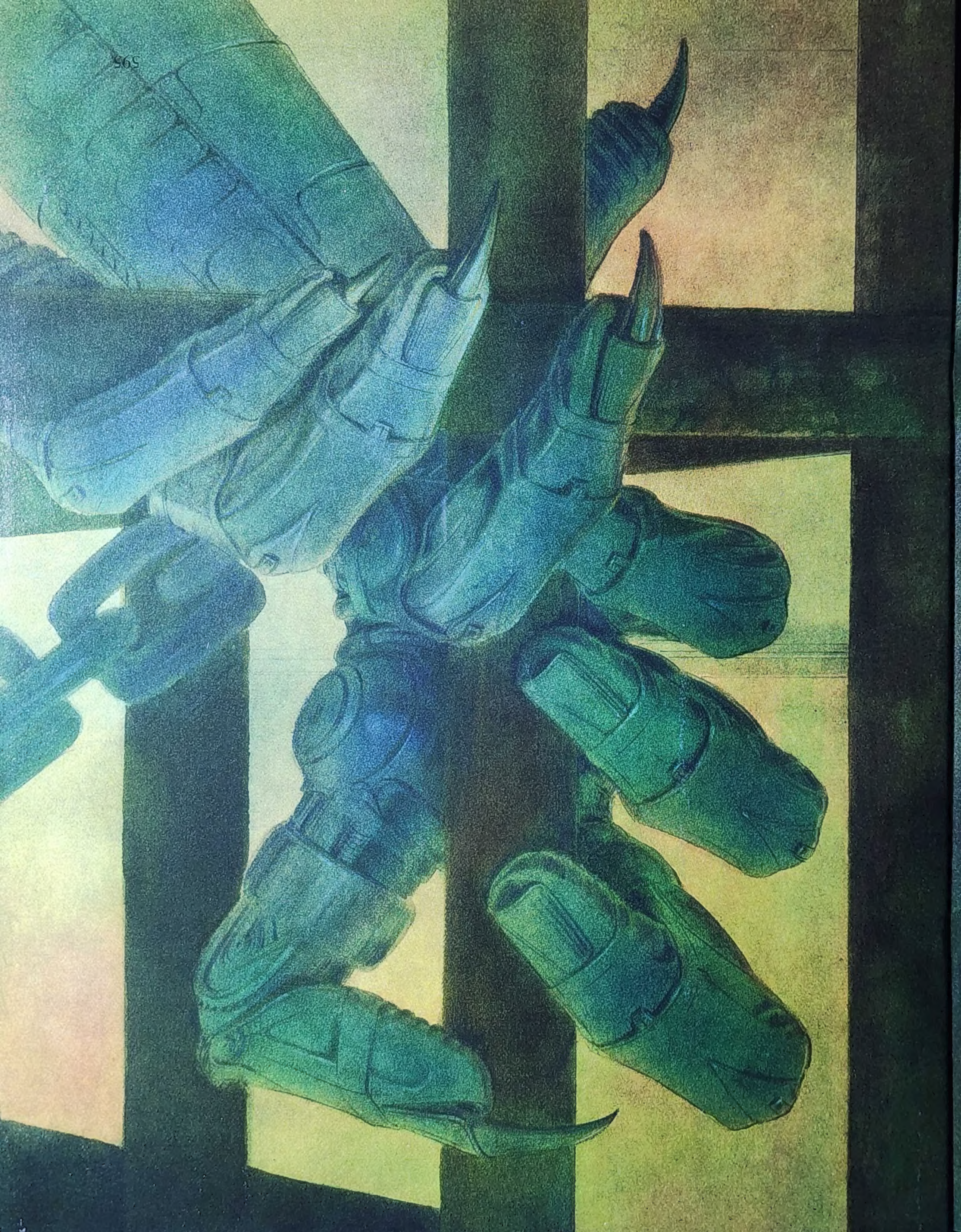
The pair continued to explore and eventually came to a staircase. At the top of the stairs was a balcony that enabled them to get a better look at the zoo.

From his new vantage point, Richard was surprised to see that the building contained hundreds of small cages. In each of these was a strange looking animal. No two animals were the same. None of the creatures seemed familiar to Richard.

Richard's wonderment left him speechless. It also rendered him oblivious to the scarcely noticeable scratching sound that emanated from one of the cages right behind him.

Suddenly, he felt cold, clammy hands around his throat. One of the creatures in the cages had grabbed him. He tried to call out but it was impossible. The hands held him too tightly. He began to choke.

All at once, there was a flash of bright light and he felt the hands loosen their grip. Richard looked towards the source of the light and was startled to see that a newcomer had arrived on the scene.



Richard turned to face his rescuer and got a big surprise. Standing before him was the wizened form of a tiny old man.

WARM GREETING

He appeared to be entirely constructed from small, riveted sheets of metal. He had a long, shaggy walrus moustache that was made from coarse wire. The peaked cap that was perched on his head to complete his comic appearance could not disguise the fact that he was a robot.

"A welcome to the pair of you," he smiled. "I am Menanger, keeper of the Inter-Galactic Zoo."

It was the first friendly voice that Richard had heard in a long time. He could not help but return the robot's infectious grin. "Pleased to meet you," he replied, "my name is Richard and this is Robo. Where are we?"

"Inside my zoo, a place where one finds creatures of all colours, all creeds and all kinds," Menanger replied softly.

"Why is he talking in verse?" Richard

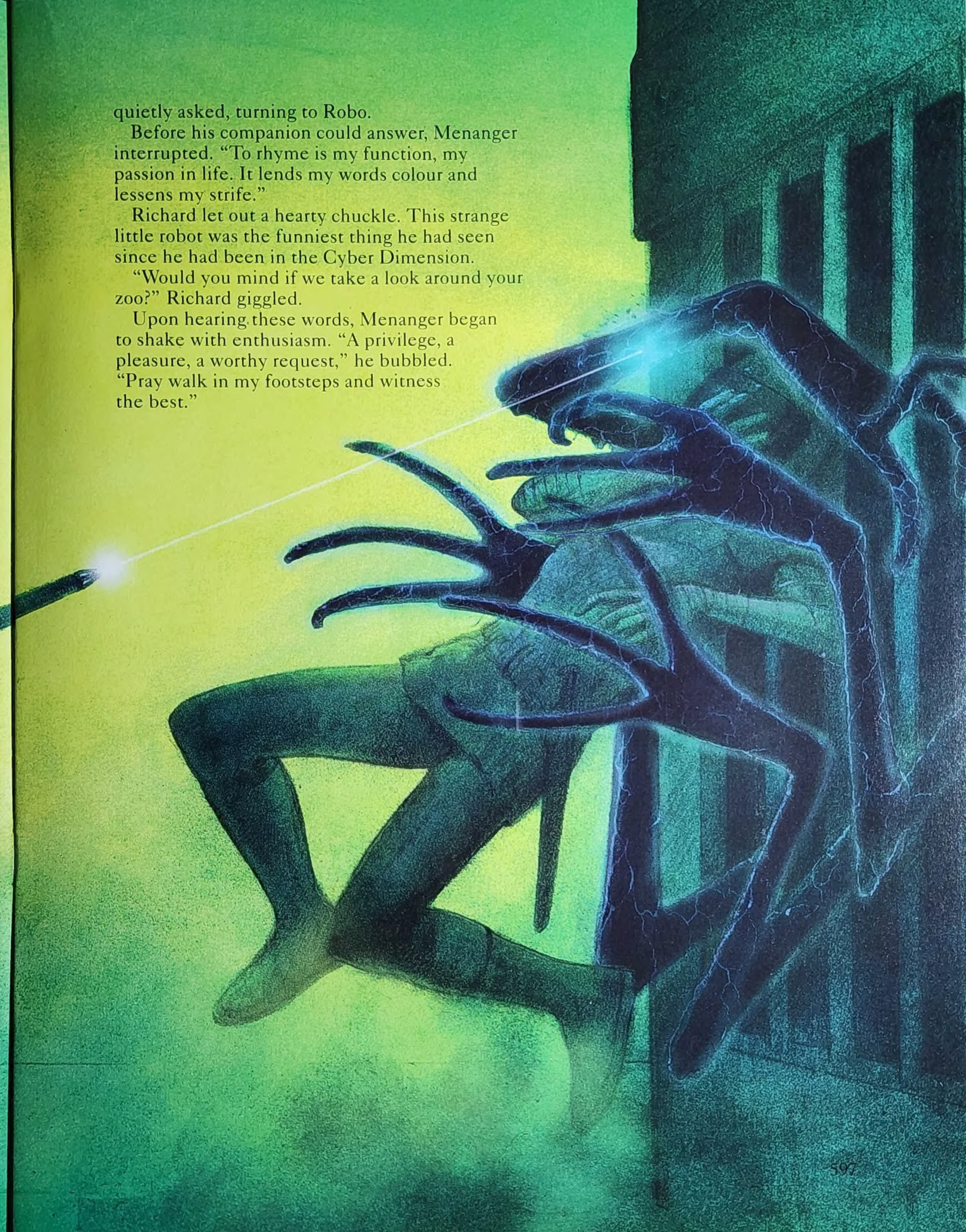
quietly asked, turning to Robo.

Before his companion could answer, Menanger interrupted. "To rhyme is my function, my passion in life. It lends my words colour and lessens my strife."

Richard let out a hearty chuckle. This strange little robot was the funniest thing he had seen since he had been in the Cyber Dimension.

"Would you mind if we take a look around your zoo?" Richard giggled.

Upon hearing these words, Menanger began to shake with enthusiasm. "A privilege, a pleasure, a worthy request," he bubbled. "Pray walk in my footsteps and witness the best."



The strange little robot led them down a long, winding corridor which was lined with metal cages. In each of the cages was a marvellous, exotic creature.

WONDROUS STORIES

As the trio walked, Menanger bounced with energy and gave a detailed description of the zoo's inhabitants. In perfect rhyme he told Richard magical tales of the planets and dimensions from which the creatures originally came.

He spoke about the majestic Kumar plant, an inhabitant of the planet Kumani, that changed into a beautiful butterfly when it reached maturity, and showered the air with fabulous fruits.

"People have come from near and far," Menanger gushed, "to taste the fruit of the Kumar."

As Richard listened in wonder, he could not help feeling a little sad. The creatures in the zoo were certainly well looked after. They were clean and had plenty to eat, but it was obvious that they were lacking something.

The sorrowful look in the eyes of those animals who possessed eyes told Richard

that they were missing their freedom. They were homesick.

Whilst he had been lost in his thoughts, Richard failed to notice that the guided tour had come to a close. He turned towards their host and was a little surprised to find Menanger standing close by, staring at him intently. "Is there anything the matter?" Richard enquired.

Captured

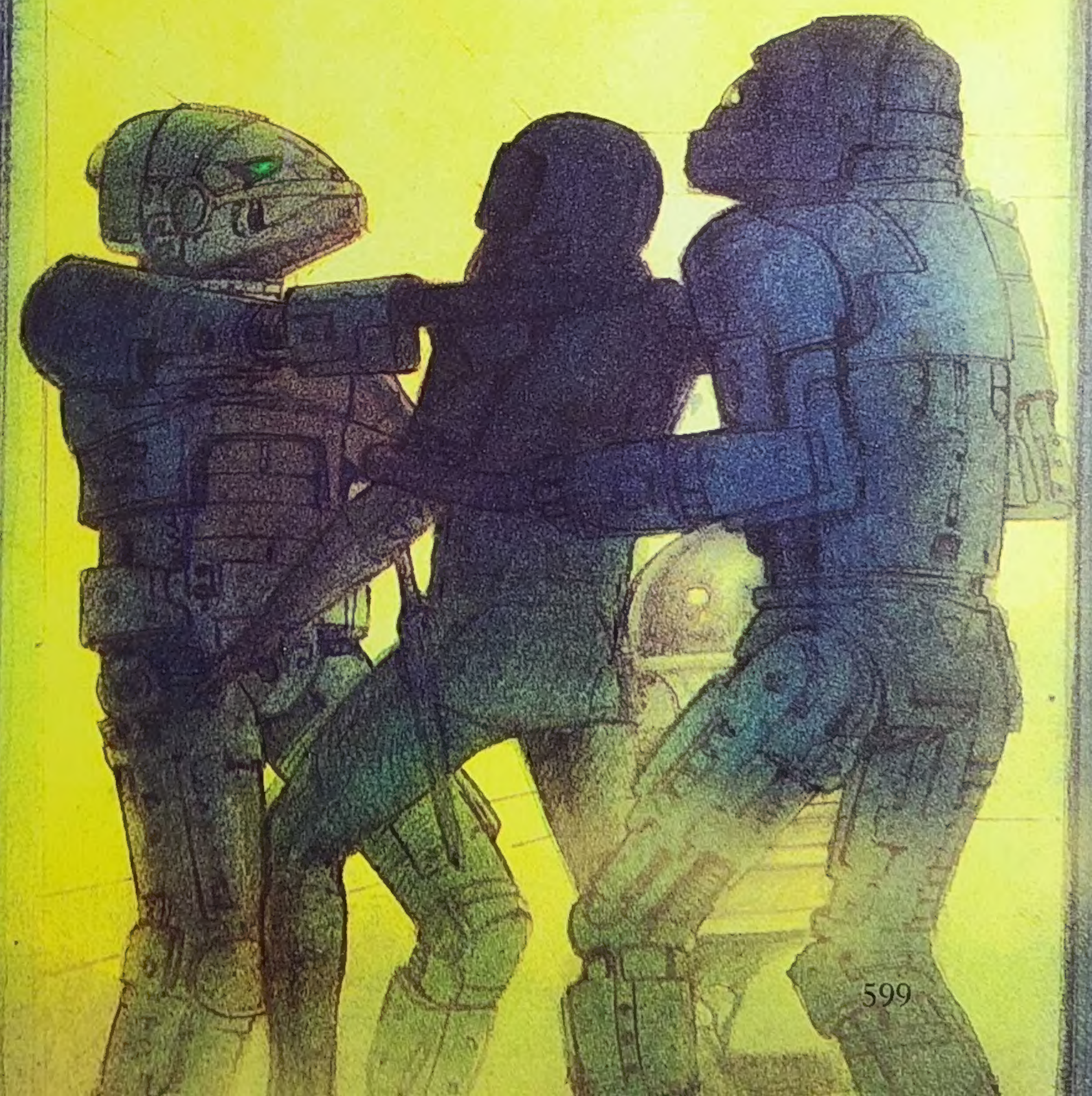
Menanger cleared his metallic throat. "One eye green and one eye grey," he said. "Indeed, this is my lucky day!"

Richard began to feel distinctly uncomfortable as Menanger fished into a pocket and produced a silver whistle.

There was an ear-splitting shriek as the robot put it to his lips and blew. Instantly, Richard and Robo were completely surrounded by a group of menacing-looking robots. "Robo, use your heat ray!" Richard cried.

"Not advisable," came the reply. "Walls of zoo are coated in reflective metal alloy. Reflected ray could damage Chosen One."

At these words, Menanger gave a hoot of triumph. "The Chosen One! My, what a prize!" he gloated. "The boy with different coloured eyes!"



Menanger's cheery face did not seem quite so comforting as Richard and Robo were frog-marched through the zoo by his robots and deposited inside a cage of their very own. As the metal bars of their new prison slid shut and the zoo keeper left without a word, Richard wondered how on earth they would escape their latest predicament. Instinct made him look towards Robo's binary panel. He was not surprised to find that a new message had appeared. Richard began to decode it.

THE MULTI-FORM

He worked fast. Richard was becoming quite an expert at translating the binary code. He was very close to completing his task when something in the next cage caught his attention. Menanger had obviously neglected to show them the inmate of this particular cell. It was easy to see why.

It was sitting on a massive metallic chair, its muscular arms and legs strapped tightly down. A deep growl shook the bars of the cage. It issued from a mouth that was lined with sharply-pointed teeth. From within a framework of knotted metal, alien eyes glowed with intelligence.

"Wh...what is it?" asked the tremulous voice of Richard.

Robo's reply was swift: "Mescon. Alien multi-form. Composed of body parts taken from inhabitants of zoo."

Lines of worry appeared on Richard's forehead. "I'm not sure I understand what you're saying," he muttered.

"Mescon is creation of Menanger. Mescon is designed to be the Evil One's supreme warrior."

"Are you telling me that the zoo keeper is keeping all these creatures here so he can manufacture his own monster?"

"Affirmative."

Although he could hardly bear it, Richard took another look at Mescon. The creature appeared to have been listening to their words. It was tapping one of its feet in irritation. Then Richard had an idea. Perhaps Mescon could be the key to their escape. Richard called nervously across to the menacing multi-form: "Hello, Mescon, how are you today?"

Immediately, the creature's growl intensified. Richard found himself sub-consciously backing away from the bars that separated the two cages.

Suddenly, there was a loud crack. Richard's face dropped as he realized that the monster had broken free of its bonds.

"Oh no," Richard quietly said. "I think we're in big trouble."

He watched in grim fascination as Mescon rose from its chair and moved towards the bars of its cell. Wrapping a two-fingered claw around the thick, tempered steel, it began to pull with all its might. Mescon was attempting to break out of its cage.

Past solution

Richard's mind raced as he sought a solution to their perilous situation. From the way that the metal bars were groaning, he estimated that it would not be too long before Mescon had broken through into their cell.

Then something unexpected happened. Without warning, a tapestry of colourful images leapt into Richard's vision. Grapfrits, Cozards, Landleapers: creatures from the old Ancestral World and the Cyber Dimension flashed by in rapid succession. Richard could not comprehend what what was happening. For one awful moment, he thought that he was seeing his life flash before him.

Then a calm, reassuring and instantly recognizable voice could be heard. It was Golan, Keeper of the Life Force. "Chosen One," he said, "read the binary message and search the past – the answer awaits you there." Then Golan was gone and suddenly Richard understood.

"Drahcir! Drahcir! Drahcir!" he yelled with all his might. His call was immediately accompanied by a loud grinding noise. Richard hastily looked around to see that the entrance to the cage was sliding open.

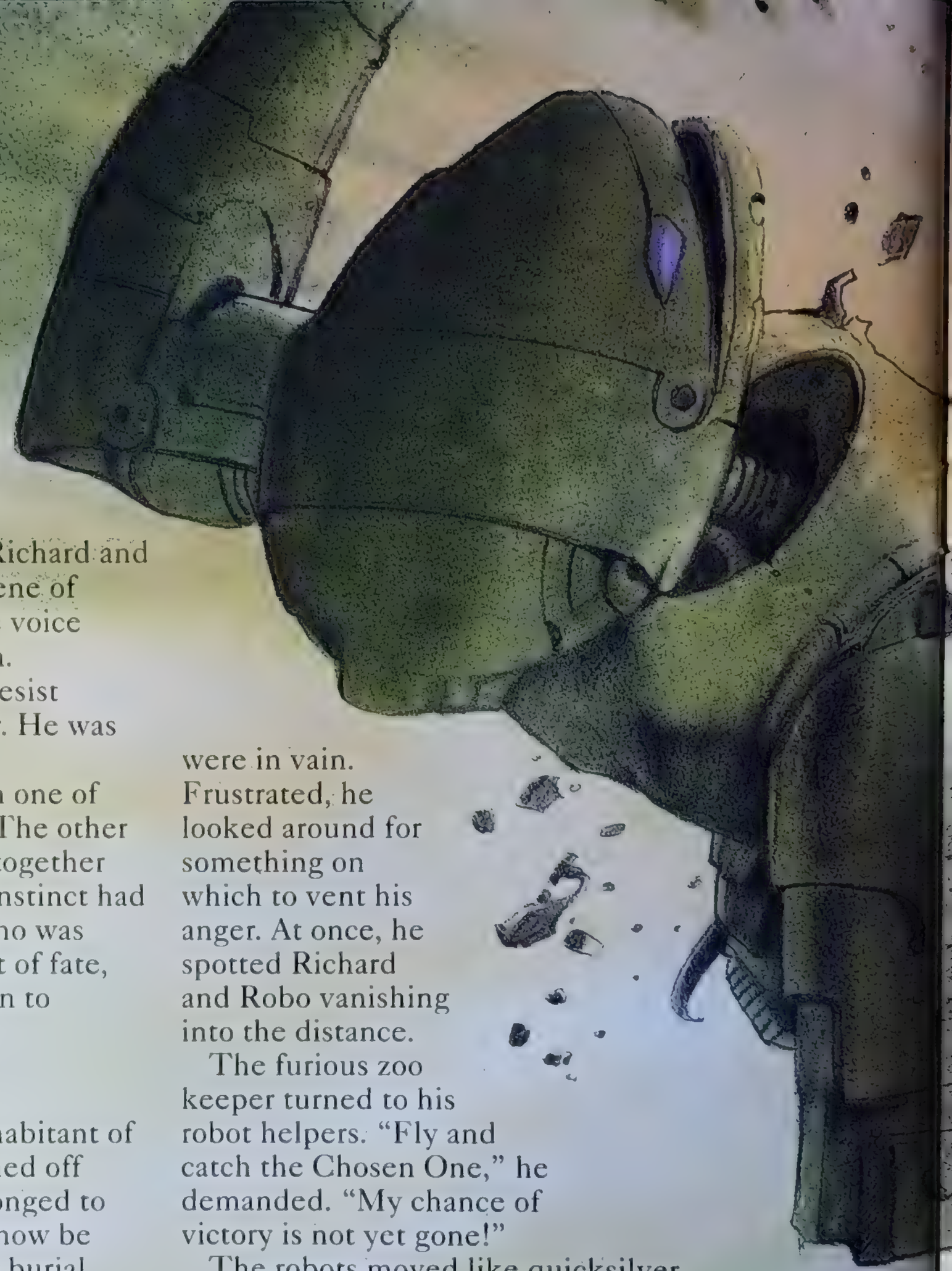
Richard now understood the meaning of the binary message. It was telling him to

remember the last time he was trapped in a prison. On that occasion he had been caught inside a magic bubble belonging to Syrus, Spirit of the Sky. Richard had gained release by speaking his own name backwards three times. The ploy had proven equally effective this time.

Mass escape

However, the incantation from the past had not only provided his liberation, it had also freed all of the other animals in the zoo – including Mescon.

The creatures were obviously not in the best of humour. Richard watched in horror as they began to attack one another. "Let's get out of here!" he cried.



A terrible roar rent the air as Richard and Robo scurried away from the scene of carnage. Richard recognized the voice instantly. It belonged to Mescon.

As he ran, Richard could not resist stealing a look over his shoulder. He was shocked by what he saw.

Mescon's bellow had not been one of rage – it had been a cry of fear. The other inmates of the zoo had banded together and turned on the multi-form. Instinct had told them that it was Mescon who was their real enemy. In a cruel twist of fate, the horde of creatures had begun to reclaim what was their own.

Rightful owners

A wild Trebo beast, the only inhabitant of the planet Trebesis, had wrenched off Mescon's head. It had once belonged to one of his comrades and would now be carried away and given a decent burial.

A nocturnal Cub-Cub plant had ripped away Mescon's right arm. Although it was coated in metal alloy, the lush, sap-filled innards could be replanted to grow a new Cub-Cub plant. Other zoo inmates could also be seen taking back what was once theirs. Soon, almost nothing remained of the once awesome Mescon.

Suddenly, the sound of a high-pitched whistle was added to the hubbub. Richard had heard the sound once before and knew what it meant. The zoo keeper and his robots had returned.

"No! No! No!" the little robot moaned, his face distorted with rage. "Let my creation go!"

The pile of scrap that lay motionless on the ground told Menanger that his pleas were in vain. Frustrated, he looked around for something on which to vent his anger. At once, he spotted Richard and Robo vanishing into the distance.

The furious zoo keeper turned to his robot helpers. "Fly and catch the Chosen One," he demanded. "My chance of victory is not yet gone!"

The robots moved like quicksilver. In an instant they were upon Richard and his companion. "Robo – use your heat ray!" cried Richard. "I'll try and avoid it if it gets reflected back."

Retaliation

Robo did not reply. Instead a volley of deadly heat rays surged from the small, circular opening in his head. The smell of melting metal filled the air as, one by one, the pursuing robots fell to the ground.

Those that evaded the blasts were quickly felled with a few savage sweeps of Richard's sword.

"Oh foul boy. Oh worthless fool!" Menanger cried, witnessing the demise of his army of robot helpers. "How could you be so very cruel!"

There was an ironic smile on Richard's face as he offered his response: "Menanger, it is no surprise – this is how we deal with lies."

Richard's comment was not appreciated by the robotic zoo keeper, who let out a scream of fury.

"I know that it wasn't the best piece of poetry", Richard laughed, turning to Robo, "but at least I tried!"

"Suggest we leave galactic zoo immediately," Robo replied. "Menanger is still dangerous."

As if to provide proof of Robo's words, the sound of sirens could be heard echoing throughout the zoo.

"Which way?" Richard asked.

"Follow me," replied Robo.

Robo moved fast. With Richard hot on his trail, the robot hurried through a network of tunnels and corridors. "Sensors scanning for exit," he called.

Behind them, the sound of the sirens grew gradually fainter. "Robo, can't you slow down a little?" Richard pleaded breathlessly. "We must be out of danger by now."

Deadly spikes

"Negative," Robo replied. "Menanger is in control of the whole building. There are many booby traps."

Much to Richard's dismay, Robo's warning soon proved to be justified. At first he thought that his eyes must be deceiving him. As Richard ran he noticed that something appeared to

be coming out of the walls. He suddenly realized what was happening and beads of sweat began to trickle down his brow.

"Robo," he gasped, "the walls are closing in!"

"Affirmative," the robot replied. "Poison-tipped spikes are also appearing."

"We must run faster," Richard said.

Although he was desperately in need of a rest, Richard forced his legs to move with more speed. As he scurried through the darkened tunnel, he could see that its width was getting smaller and smaller. Escape would be impossible if they did not find an exit soon.

"How much further?" Richard panted.

The robot's sensors continued to scan the surrounding area to no avail. Time was running out.

Suddenly, the robot began to hum and click furiously. "Exit straight ahead," he proclaimed in triumph.

Sure enough, in the distance Richard could see a small pin-prick of light. He headed speedily for it.

Robo was faster. As Richard struggled to put one foot in front of the other, the robot was already approaching the exit. "Hurry, Chosen One," he called.

Through weary eyes, Richard could see that it was not only the walls of the tunnel that were closing in. The exit to the zoo was also diminishing in size. "Just a few more steps," he told himself.

STRANDED

Robo was already safely through as Richard made it to within touching distance of the doorway to freedom. The deadly spikes were closing in fast as he prepared to leave the horrors of the strange galactic zoo. At the last moment, disaster struck.

Richard staggered on, but he was so tired that he failed to notice a small piece of debris littering the floor near the exit. With a clatter, he tripped over it and fell flat on his face. As he rose stiffly to his feet, he looked on in dismay and horror. He had missed his chance. The doorway was closing. It was already too small for Richard to clamber through. He was trapped.

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

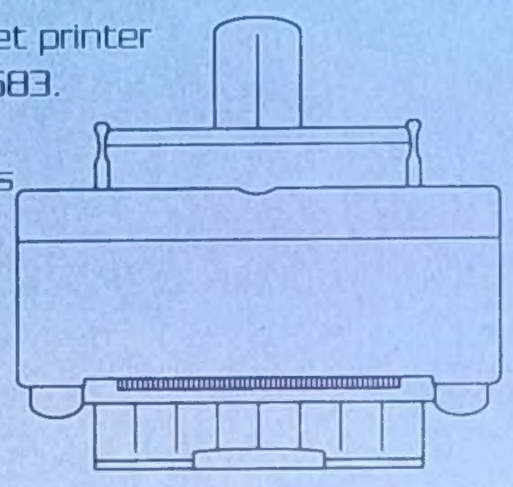
▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Shoomi and Shoobi are still hot on the trail of Richard and his robotic companion. Use your powers of observation to see if you can spot them in under three minutes.

In issue 37 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 582.

▶ Computer Challenge

Hidden somewhere in this issue is a vitally important computer component from the sinister Cyber Dimension. Use your visual skills to help Richard and his friend Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?



In issue 37 a bubble jet printer was hidden on page 583. Bubble jet printers connect to computers and are used to create an image on paper that is the same as the one the computer user can see on screen. They work by shooting a minute jet of super-heated ink on to paper. The ink is so hot that it dries instantly.

▶ Competition Details

In each issue you will find letter blocks. Cut these out and keep them safe. When you have collected 26 letter blocks, you will be given a clue which will help you form them into a sentence that reveals the fatal flaw in the Cyber Dimension. The prize for the competition is a super Sega Mega Drive, complete with a copy of the great new role-playing game Shining Force.
Details on how to enter the competition will be given in a later issue.
NB The competition will be open to residents of the UK and Eire only.

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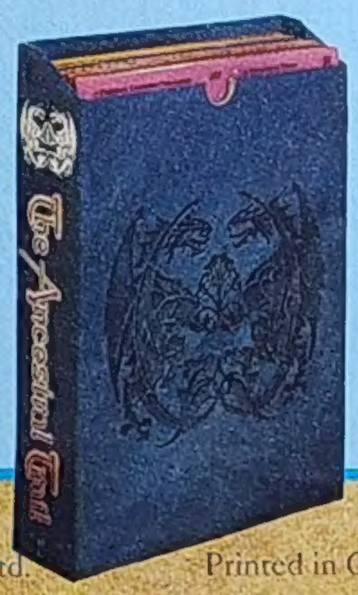

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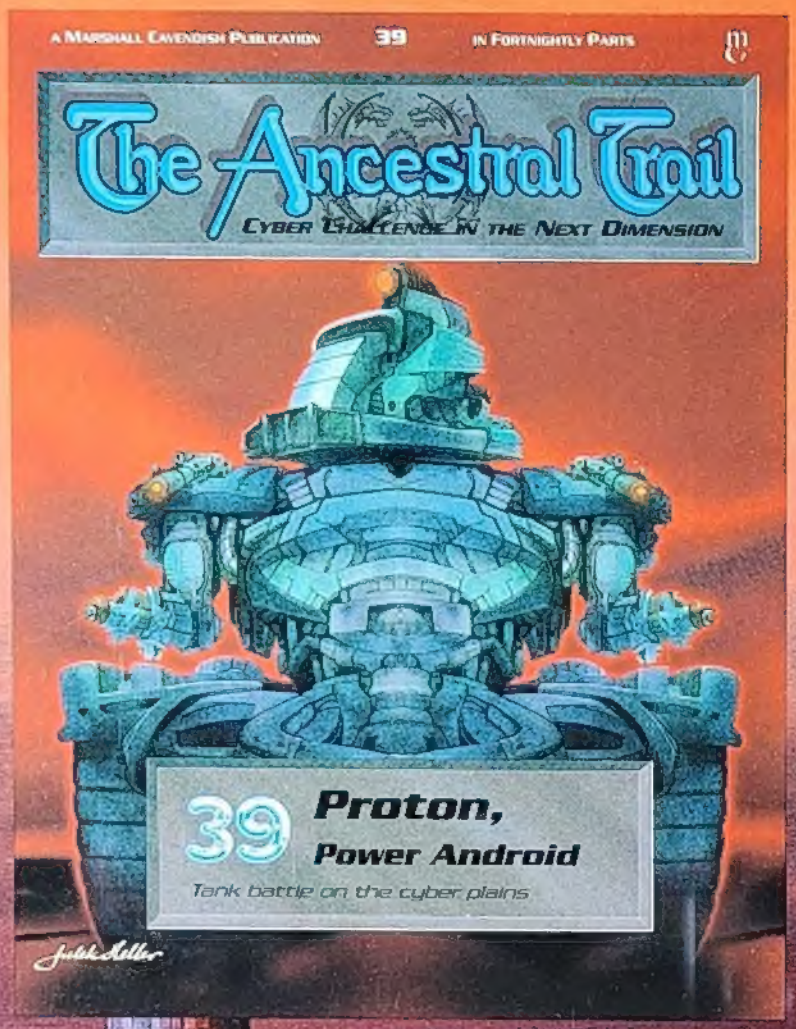

In Issue 39

Proton,
Power Android

Richard gets behind the controls of a cyber tank and enters a battleground. Can he defeat a gigantic robot to locate the next Omni piece?

plus

- Two more **Techscan** cards
- Four more **Cyber Power** cards

Coming in Issue 40

Kentar, Cyber Demon

Richard and Robo encounter a city in the clouds. There they are swallowed by an giant cyber sea serpent. Can they escape to continue their quest?

plus

Second piece of your **Cyber Chess** and **Mainframe Control** playing boards.

ISBN 0-7485-4503-4

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